

## THE ACTIVITY OF SZYMON DANKOWICZ, THE CHIEF RABBI OF BULGARIA (1889-1891), IN THE LIGHT OF THE SOURCES PRODUCED WITHIN THE CIRCLES OF THE ALLIANCE ISRAÉLITE UNIVERSELLE<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract:** This article concerns the events that occurred in Sofia, Bulgaria, in the late 1880s and the early 1890s when the position of the Chief Rabbi of Bulgaria was granted to an Ashkenazi rabbi Szymon Dankowicz (1834-1910). Dankowicz was able to obtain this title thanks to the Alliance Israélite Universelle (AIU) which intensified its activities in Bulgaria after the country had been liberated from the Turkish occupation in 1879 and the Principality of Bulgaria had been formed. The main focus of this article is to present the activities of Dankowicz in Bulgaria as well as the relations between the Sephardic and the Ashkenazi Jews in that period as they are depicted in the sources stored in the archives of the AIU in Paris.

The purpose of this article is to bring to light a little-known chapter in the history of the Bulgarian Jewish Diaspora in the 19<sup>th</sup> century,<sup>2</sup> namely, the activities of Szymon Dankowicz, who served as the Chief Rabbi of Bulgaria from 1881 to 1891. This office was created under the Constitution of Turnovo which regulated the status of the Jews after the liberation of Bulgaria from the Turkish occupation in 1879. The Constitution included the provisions of the Treaty of Berlin regarding religious minorities in Bulgaria and Eastern Rumelia. As a result, the Jewish communities were granted a certain degree of autonomy and freedoms. The Constitution guaranteed the freedom of worship to all religions insofar as it did not infringe on the laws of the country. The Constitution stipulated that a chief rabbi, who would be paid from the State Treasury and treated like any other high government official, was to become the head of all Jewish communities and officially represent them before the state.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, despite all these favourable political changes, the situation of the Jews in the 1880s was an adverse one, primarily because of their disadvantageous economic standing as well as bad relations with the Bulgarian population and a growing wave of anti-Semitism fuelled by a number of anti-Jewish pamphlets published in the last two decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> About this subject, cf. Gelber 1946; Ardit 1970; Keshales 1972; Tamir 1979; Rozen 2005.

<sup>3</sup> Tamir 1979: 99; Maślak-Maciejewska 2013: 117-119.

<sup>4</sup> Concerning anti-Semitic pamphlets published after the liberation of Bulgaria, cf. Benvenisti 1980.

An important factor that had a positive impact on the situation of the Jews in Bulgaria in the last quarter of the 19th century was the Alliance Israélite Universelle (AIU), founded in Paris in 1860, which had been expanding its influence and activities to the areas of South-Eastern Europe populated by the Sephardic diasporas. The philosophy of the AIU, as summarized by E. Benbassa and A. Rodrigue, “represented Western Jewry’s urge to reform its coreligionists in the East”.<sup>5</sup> The work of the AIU was multidimensional. Firstly, it focused on defending the rights and interests of the Jews, seeking to improve their political situation and facilitate their legal emancipation in those areas and protect them from persecution.<sup>6</sup> Secondly, the AIU conducted work of charitable and social nature on a wide scale. Above all, however, the Alliance’s main focus was educational activity, conducted in gradually expanding network of schools. In these schools, which became the instrument of Westernization, French was the language of instruction and—apart from the teaching of Hebrew and Judaism—the local language and general subjects, such as history, geography, or sciences, were an important items of the curriculum.<sup>7</sup>

The first Alliance school was founded in Tetuan, Morocco in 1862. In 1914, the network of Alliance’s educational institutions already encompassed 183 schools attended by 43,700 students.<sup>8</sup> The first school in the Ottoman Empire was founded in 1865 in Volos (modern-day Greece). In Bulgaria, the schools had began to be formed almost a decade before its liberation—in 1870 a school for boys was opened in Shumen. Other schools in these lands were founded in Vidin (1872), Samkov (1874) and Rouse (1879). In total, by the end of the 19th century, seventeen schools in eleven Bulgarian cities were established (customarily, each city hosted two schools—one for boys and one for girls, the latter usually opened several years after the former).<sup>9</sup>

The role that the teachers in the AIU schools were supposed to perform was a very special one, involving far more than teaching and dealing with administrative matters. Living in towns in which the organization operated, they reported to the AIU Central Committee in Paris on the situation of the Jews as well as the current issues that stirred the community at large. Due to the fact that, very often, they were the only representatives of the AIU in the area, the local Jews consulted them when problems arose; in such circumstances, the teacher was authorized by the AIU to intervene with the local authorities or to make a request to the headquarters of the organisation for support or intervention on a higher political level. The role performed by the teacher, who was a protector of the Jews and a representative of their interests, can be compared to that of a *shtadlan* in a typical Jewish community.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Benbassa & Rodrigue 2000: 83.

<sup>6</sup> For example, it exerted pressure on the British and German political circles before and during the Congress of Berlin, which contributed to the enactment of favourable laws for religious minorities (religious freedom and equal rights regardless of professed religion), cf. Chouraqui 1965: 86-87; Tamir 1979: 98.

<sup>7</sup> A permanent curriculum emerged in the years 1883 to 1884; before, there had been a greater freedom in this regard, cf. Rodrigue 1993: 25-30.

<sup>8</sup> Benbassa & Rodrigue 1998: 9.

<sup>9</sup> Rodrigue 1993: 15-16.

<sup>10</sup> Rodrigue 1993: 201. In reference literature, their role has been summarized as follows: “The work of the Alliance Israélite Universelle in the Sephardi and oriental Jewish communities depended almost exclusively on the activities of the schools’ teachers and directors. While they had to supervise the daily functioning of the educational system, they were very much more than ordinary pedagogues. They represented

The teachers in the AIU schools were greatly committed to their educational and social work which, in consequence, was marked by the sense of an ideological and moral responsibility. They were generally well-educated and, apart from the teaching work, they also engaged in journalism and literary endeavours, quickly becoming members of the intellectual elite. For their work, however, they received relatively low remuneration.<sup>11</sup>

One of such teachers was Gabriel Arié, born in 1863 in Samakov in the Ottoman Bulgaria. As a child, he received a traditional religious education in melder (an equivalent of the Ashkenazi heder) and then he attended an AIU school established in his hometown in 1874. During the Russo-Turkish War (1877-1878), he moved to the AIU school in Balat, a Jewish quarter of Istanbul. After graduation, he decided to choose the career of a teacher in the AIU schools and thus he completed a four-year studies at the *École Normale Israélite Orientale* in Paris, founded in 1867 to provide teachers' training in accordance with the aims of the organization. During his stay in Paris, Arié won a remarkable confidence, as well as appreciation for his work, of his teachers and the members of the AIU Central Committee. As noted by E. Benbassa and A. Rodrigue, who wrote a book about Gabriel Arié, he became a "favorite son of the Alliance" and his relationship with the members of the AIU authorities were absolutely outstanding—intimate, close, and, simply put, friendly.<sup>12</sup>

In 1887, when an all-boys AIU school was founded in Sofia, Arié became its head teacher and held this position until 1893, showing great commitment and initiative.<sup>13</sup> Like any other AIU schoolmaster, he reported to Paris very often, in some periods writing letters even each day. In this correspondence, he detailed not only educational matters (such as curricula, the construction of a new school building, problems with teachers and students) but also social relations within the Jewish community and issues it dealt with. Because of his close association with the AIU authorities, he freely expressed his views, opinions, and judgements. In his letters, one can discern two perspectives. The first one is a perspective from within—as a Bulgarian, Arié perfectly understood the problems of the community. However, a few years of education in Paris, during which he thoroughly explored the philosophy and the mission of the AIU as well as friendships he formed with many of its members, gave him an outside perspective and a broader outlook on the life of Jews in Bulgaria.

This body of letters, which has survived to the present day and is stored in the AIU Archive in Paris, is currently a source whose importance cannot be overestimated. It is a testimony to all major processes and phenomena that occurred in the Jewish community of Sofia in the late 1880s and the early 1890s, such as Westernization, an increasing

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Alliance locally, provided it with almost daily information events which might concern it", cf. Benbassa & Rodrigue 2000: 85.

<sup>11</sup> Rodrigue 1993: 51-62.

<sup>12</sup> Benbassa & Rodrigue 1998: 11-12. This book is provided with an extensive introduction and contains a wide selection of texts produced by G. Arié—both his letters sent to the Central Committee of the Alliance and his never-before-published autobiography.

<sup>13</sup> Benbassa & Rodrigue 1998: 13.

influence of the AIU, the dynamics of the relationships between the Ashkenazi and the Sephardic Jews as well as the incidents of anti-Semitism.<sup>14</sup>

One of the events that these letters allow to investigate in details is the work of the first Ashkenazi Jew to hold the position of the Chief Rabbi of the country—Szymon Dankowicz.<sup>15</sup> His stay in Sofia in the years 1888 to 1892 coincided with the period when G. Arié was the head teacher of the AIU school in Sofia and regularly sent letters to Paris. This correspondence sheds light both on the complicated course of events initiated in the fall of 1887 which led to the appointment of Dankowicz as the Chief Rabbi as well as on the years of his rabbinic ministry and, eventually, the loss of this position.<sup>16</sup>

As mentioned above, since 1880, the Chief Rabbi was supposed to be a legal representative of the Bulgarian Jews before the public authorities and thus he was able to really affect their situation. The first to be granted this honour was Gabriel Almosnino, who at the time held the position of the Rabbi of Sofia. As soon as the 1884, the Bulgarian Jews began their efforts to replace Almosnino with a person from Western Europe, someone thoroughly educated but, above all, young and dynamic; someone who would actively defend the interests of the Bulgarian Jewish community.<sup>17</sup> Such candidates were missing in the country. The problem of choosing a new Rabbi returned in 1885 when Almosnino resigned from the post. A special committee formed in Sofia towards the end of 1887 in order to choose a new Rabbi. At that time, all-boys AIU school had already been operating in the city and the influence of the organization on the Jewish community had greatly increased. The strength of this influence is evident in the fact that the newly constituted committee first turned to Paris, asking for suggestions as to the candidates for the post of the Chief Rabbi. It is also worth noting that the committee's secretary was Gabriel Arié himself, who systematically sent to Paris detailed reports on the committee's meetings.<sup>18</sup>

The first person whose candidacy came into consideration was Moses Netter, a Sephardic rabbi of Algerian origin, recommended by the AIU. His position was very strong and it seemed that he would be granted the post.<sup>19</sup> However, in March 1888, when the details of Netter's future employment—such as his availability and salary—were already being negotiated, the opposition of the Jewish community became so strong that other candidates began to be considered. At that point, Arié already sensed that Netter's candidacy would fail and, with some discontent, he informed the Central Committee about

<sup>14</sup> The sources for this article come from the following units stored in this archive: Bulgarie: I C 5; I C 7; I C 10; IV B 99; XXII E 153a; XXIII E 153b; XXII E 153c.

<sup>15</sup> Szymon Dankowicz (1834-1910)—a rabbi, a preacher, and a teacher. A graduate of the Main School in Warsaw and of the Jewish Theological Seminary in Breslau. Before coming to Sofia, he worked in the Jewish community in Kraków (1868-1875) where he became the first regular preacher of the Tempel Progressive Synagogue. While living on territory of former Poland, he led an intensive patriotic work. For more information on his activities before coming to Bulgaria cf. Maślak-Maciejewska 2013: 19-115.

<sup>16</sup> The issue of the activity and the competence of the Chief Rabbis of Bulgaria have not yet been explored in depth; moreover, the reference literature lacks the answer to the question why from the end of the 1880s onward the position of the Chief Rabbi in the country populated mostly by the Sephardic Jews was granted to Ashkenazi rabbis.

<sup>17</sup> At the time, such a solution was rejected by the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Religion, cf. Avraamov 1987: 68-69.

<sup>18</sup> AAIU Bulg. XXII E 153a. 15.11.1887; 16.12.1887.

<sup>19</sup> AAIU Bulg. XXII E 153a; 15.11.1887; 16.12.1887; 25.01.1888; 20.02.1888; 5.03.1888; 16.03.1888.

this.<sup>20</sup> His correspondence shows that the objections were voiced primarily by the Ashkenazi minority, who for a long time had unsuccessfully sought to establish closer relations with the Sephardic community. The choice of a rabbi of Polish or Austrian origin could facilitate the integration of the two communities. It was stressed, moreover, that a Slavic rabbi would learn the Bulgarian language faster and gain influence in the country easier.<sup>21</sup> In the spring of 1888, while still negotiating with Netter, the committee started to send to eminent European rabbis requests for additional opinions on Netter as well as for suggestions as to another candidate.<sup>22</sup> In April 1888, the committee received an answer from Adolf Jellinek from Vienna who, with a high degree of confidence, recommended Szymon Dankowicz for the post.<sup>23</sup> However, that Dankowicz was eventually invited to Sofia for the talks was probably the effect of a personal meeting of the committee's chairman Abraham D. Levy with Jellinek in Vienna, in June 1888. During this meeting Jellinek assured Levy that Dankowicz was fit for the position and that his appointment would bring many benefits to the Bulgarian Jewry. He also mentioned that if the candidate he endorsed was chosen, he would use his influence to obtain additional financial resources to organise the Bulgarian Chief Rabbinate. The AIU, whose representatives had, too, previously asked Jellinek to name a suitable candidate, raised no objections to such a solution.<sup>24</sup>

Dankowicz arrived in Sofia on July 1, 1888, for a week-long visit; during his stay, the committee was to decide whether to grant him the post. After a few days, the negotiations concerning the terms of Dankowicz's employment were commenced; factors such as the amount of his salary, the length of the contract, and housing conditions were considered. Eventually, Dankowicz's initial requests were reduced—the committee did not agree to reimburse the cost of his removal or to signing a contract for indefinite period of time (a three-year contract was agreed to instead); moreover, his annual salary was reduced by a fifth.<sup>25</sup> Also, there were concerns related to Dankowicz's Ashkenazi extraction, which is evident by the fact that it was decided that a special administrative council would be established, with members elected from among the Sephardic Jews, without whose consent Dankowicz would not have the authority to take any decision relating to the Ashkenazi community.<sup>26</sup>

When on July 6 Dankowicz agreed to the conditions he was presented with, his candidacy was voted through and the procedure of granting him Bulgarian citizenship was commenced. This finally occurred in December 1888 and only after that, on December 19, 1888, by the virtue of the Prince's ukase, Dankowicz was granted the office of the

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<sup>20</sup> AAIU Bulg. XXII E 153; 1.04.1888. Arié wrote in this letter that he sensed that "the future rabbi will come from Poland or at least from Austria, for the greatest satisfaction of our local Ashkenazi community."

<sup>21</sup> AAIU Bulg. XXII E 153a; 1.4.1888.

<sup>22</sup> Among others, rabbis from Warsaw, Vienna, St. Petersburg, Berlin were asked to give their opinions, cf. AAIU Bulg. XXII E 153a; 19.03.1888; 1.4.1888.

<sup>23</sup> AAIU Bulg. XXII E 153a; 25.4.1888.

<sup>24</sup> AAIU Bulg. XXII E 153a; 4.7.1888. For more information on how the election of Dankowicz was influenced by Jellinek, cf. Maślak-Maciejewska 2013: 123-124.

<sup>25</sup> AAIU Bulg. XXII E 153a; 4.7.1888; 18.7.1888.

<sup>26</sup> AAIU Bulg. XXII E 153a ; 18.07.1888.

Chief Rabbi of Bulgaria.<sup>27</sup> In a letter of January 3, 1889, Gabriel Arié described a general feeling accompanying these events:

Today, a new chapter in the history of our community has been opened. We're entering into an unpredictable period: the direction that the matters of our community will take in the future is going to depend heavily on the work, the authority, and the experience of Mr Dankowicz.<sup>28</sup>

Dankowicz's duties in Sofia included, first and foremost, protecting the rights and interests of all the Jewish communities in Bulgaria and representing them before the state authorities. It is well-established that Dankowicz managed to maintain good relations with the Prince of Bulgaria, knyaz Ferdinand I.<sup>29</sup> His competence as the Chief Rabbi allowed him to make decisions affecting all Jewish communities, such as organizing a census or initiating the work on a universal statute.<sup>30</sup> His responsibilities encompassed caring for the state of the Jewish communities in the rural areas of Bulgaria; because of this, he regularly visited them and systematically solved any problems arising there.<sup>31</sup> One of Dankowicz's primary duties was to take the lead in religious matters throughout Bulgaria and to chair a religious court which, among other things, gave its opinion on the conversion cases. His religious ministry also included giving sermons in Sofia, at least on the occasion of important holidays.<sup>32</sup>

Dankowicz focused much of his efforts on improving the quality of the education of children and youths—he often visited the AIU school in Sofia and even assisted on final exams in religious education; he was also involved in revising its curriculum—for example, he initiated a discussion on increasing the number of hours devoted to learning Hebrew.<sup>33</sup>

A description of all of the above-mentioned duties performed by Dankowicz can be found in the letters of G. Arié sent to the AIU Central Committee in Paris; not all issues, however, are discussed there in equal details—some, such as Dankowicz's visits to the rural communities or his work in the religious court, have only been touched upon while describing other matters. Other issues were discussed in details and in a series of letters. Matters on which Arié reported most extensively, apart from Dankowicz's appointment to the position and his subsequent loss of it, were his fight against anti-Semitism as well as involvement in the educational issues. Undoubtedly, matters connected to education and social or legal problems of the community were of great interest to the AIU Central Committee; these were the areas in which it could provide financial and diplomatic support.

The event to which Arié devoted most attention and described in dozens of letters is the scandal in Vratza. In June 1891, the Jews from Vratza were indicted on a charge of committing a ritual murder, that is, the so-called blood libel, on a Christian girl. This case dramatically worsened the situation of the Jews in Vratza and led to the publication

<sup>27</sup> AAIU Bulg. XXII E 153a; 4.12.1888; 3.1.1889.

<sup>28</sup> AAIU Bulg. XXII E 153a; 3.1.1889.

<sup>29</sup> DN 1892, 30; AI 1890, 44.

<sup>30</sup> Maślak-Maciejewska 2013: 129-130.

<sup>31</sup> Arditi 1970:120; AAIU Bulg. XXIII E 153b; 13.7.1890.

<sup>32</sup> AAIU Bulg. XXII E 153a; 25.1.1888; 31.1.1888.

<sup>33</sup> AAIU Bulg. XXII E 153a; 4.1.1889; 31.1.1889; AAIU Bulg. XXIII E 153b; 16.5.1890; cf. Maślak-Maciejewska 2013: 131-135.

of a number of anti-Semitic pamphlets which even further exacerbated Christian-Jewish relations in the country.<sup>34</sup> In the autumn of 1891, Szymon Dankowicz also got involved in defending the accused by publishing a brochure entitled “The Jews and Blood,” which aim was to demonstrate that the allegations that the Jews used Christian blood in some sort rites was absurd. The brochure, dedicated by the author to “Christian fellow citizens who love truth and justice,” was probably the strongest voice against anti-Semitism in Bulgaria at that time.<sup>35</sup> In October 1891, during the trial of the accused from Vratza, Dankowicz appeared in the court with a copy of the brochure, which, however, seemed to have had no impact on the opinion of the judges. Its contents were referred to in the official act of indictment but they appeared alongside popular anti-Semitic texts, indicating the truthfulness of the blood libel claims. It was stated that although for the educated Jews the use of blood may have seemed unacceptable, “the uneducated Jewish masses may treat this as God’s order.”<sup>36</sup>

The publication of this brochure turned out to have very negative consequences for Dankowicz himself, who, in turn, was accused of presenting the Christian population in a bad light—as fanatical and cruel. It was felt that the opinion delivered by a person holding a high position partially paid from the State Treasury may harm the image of Bulgaria in Europe. As a result, Dankowicz was put before the court. The indictment was prepared already in November 1891 and the trial began on February 12, 1892 before the Criminal Court in Sofia.<sup>37</sup>

In December 1891, Dankowicz’s three-year contract expired and the discussions about its potential extension coincided with the alarming news of the lawsuit. The letters of G. Arié allow to retrace these events in details.<sup>38</sup> On one hand, in October 1891, there were talks of extending Dankowicz’s contract, even at the cost of yielding to some of his demands. The lawsuit, however, damaged the trust put in the rabbi and sparked off opposition to his activities; concerns started to be raised that he hadn’t showed sufficient discernment in local affairs and that he had ceased to be a worthy representative of the Jewish population because he had lost the confidence of the state authorities. Arié’s subsequent letters show that the moods of the community’s authorities were changing and so was the stand of Dankowicz himself, who in the autumn of 1891 was prepared to resign from the position but who then fought to keep it, disagreeing with the reasons for the dismissal.<sup>39</sup>

Dankowicz left Sofia in the late March or the early April of 1892, after the Prince had issued an order dismissing him from the position. Already in March, the duties of Chief

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<sup>34</sup> AAIU Bulg. I C 5.

<sup>35</sup> Dankowicz 1891.

<sup>36</sup> AAIU Bulg. I C 5.

<sup>37</sup> Arié reported to Paris in details about all the stages of the trial; he also sent a translation of both the brochure and the act of indictment into French language, cf. AAIU Bulg. I C 5; 18.10.1891; 10.1.1892; 4.2.1892; 12.2.1892; AAIU Bulg. I C 7.

<sup>38</sup> AAIU Bulg. I C 5; I C 7. Letters sent between October 1891 and April 1892.

<sup>39</sup> One of the reasons for the dismissal, apart from the lawsuit, was Dankowicz’s behaviour during the National Assembly in December 1891 where he wilfully seated himself next to Archbishop Parteni, instead of taking a less prestigious seat that was provided for him in the diplomatic sector, cf. AAIU Bulg. I C 5; 10.1.1892; Arditi 1970: 115-118; Tamir 1979: 115.

Rabbi were temporarily entrusted to Moshe Tadjer and, eventually, this position was granted to another Ashkenazi rabbi—Moritz Grünwald.<sup>40</sup>

The sources discussed above have not yet been widely used in the study of the history of the Jews in the Principality of Bulgaria.<sup>41</sup> However, it appears that researches may use them for much more than simply retracing the educational activities of the AIU in those areas. The reports of G. Arié were very regular and meticulous; he wrote to Paris about all the major events in the life of the Jewish community in Sofia and about the matters that may have been of interest to the Central Committee. They reflected many aspects of the Jewish life, partly because the activities of the AIU included both political and social work and were closely connected to how the Jewish community was organized. In the case of the Bulgarian Jewish community, the influence of the AIU on the election of the Chief Rabbi is indisputable. Szymon Dankowicz, as well as his successors, maintained a regular contact with the AIU Central Committee by mail; Dankowicz wrote to Paris concerning some consequential matters, such as the revision of the schools' curriculum or the construction of the new school building. Sometimes he also interceded for individuals or organizations petitioning the AIU for assistance. Shortly after being appointed as the Chief Rabbi of Bulgaria, Dankowicz wrote to Paris a letter in which he expressed a great appreciation for what the AIU had already accomplished in the fields of education and the advancement of the Jewish population of Bulgaria and he also expressed hope that he would be able to continue the work initiated by the AIU.<sup>42</sup>

Letters written to Paris by persons other than G. Arié, however, are scarce and the fact that almost the whole body of letters sent from Sofia to Paris in the years 1887 to 1892 was written by one person compels one to show considerable criticism and caution. As mentioned before, Arié enjoyed great favour of the AIU Central Committee; his letters contain many casual comments and personal remarks which do not necessarily reflect the actual or prevailing feelings of the whole Jewish community in Sofia. Such is the case, for example, with the election of Dankowicz to the position of the Chief Rabbi. On his arrival to Sofia in July 1888, Arié sent to Paris a long letter describing the candidate—his appearance, character and demeanour—in a very negative light. Among other things, he wrote:

Dankowicz's gestures, speech, and behaviour are German by which I mean that they are cold, heavy, and a bit clumsy. Without any energetic motion, without a single warm word or a single friendly gesture (...) Dankowicz haven't even smiled the whole day! The source of instruction though he may be, I'd prefer to see less depth and more refinement and splendour.<sup>43</sup>

He added, too, that Dankowicz liked to impress others with his erudition and lofty words. He also mentioned his hoarse voice. His feelings did not really change during the entire period of Dankowicz's stay in Bulgaria; in the letters he sent to the AIU in those years, he regularly included some critical comments about Dankowicz, for example that the rabbi reminded him of Molière's Tartuffe, that he lacked dignity, or that he was self-

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<sup>40</sup> AAIU Bulg. I C 5; 16.5.1893.

<sup>41</sup> In addition to synthetic studies of the history of the Jews in the Balkan countries, by A. Rodrigue and E. Benbassa, where the history of the Bulgarian Diaspora has been discussed very generally.

<sup>42</sup> AAIU Bulg. IV B 99; 20.1.1889; 9.7.1889; 21.7.1889; AAIU Bulg. XXIII 153b; 2.10.1891.

<sup>43</sup> AAIU Bulg. XXII E 153a; 1.7.1888.



centred. He accused Dankowicz of making a ritual out of eating meals, of being slow to act, and of clumsiness. Although Arié often suggested that his sentiments are shared by other members of the community, this seems unlikely in the light of facts; for example, if Dankowicz had been judged equally negatively by other members of the committee responsible for choosing the chief rabbi, he would probably never have been chosen in the first place.<sup>44</sup>

The dislike Arié showed, however, clearly reveals an important aspect of the Jewish life in the Principality of Bulgaria. With the increasing influence of the AIU, the processes of Westernization sped up and the importance of the Ashkenazi Jews increased as well. This is most evident in the fact that from 1889 the position of the Chief Rabbi of Bulgaria was occupied successively by three Ashkenazi rabbis—Szymon Dankowicz, Moritz Grünwald and Moritz Ehrenpreis. Arié was disapproving of all of them;<sup>45</sup> at the same time, he suggested the AIU to elect a candidate of Sephardic extraction. Such was the case, for example, at the turn of the years 1891 and 1892 when it was still unknown whether Dankowicz's contract would be prolonged. Arié noted at that time that the reason for many of the problems that had surfaced was Dankowicz's lack of understanding of the local colour:

There is a need for things other than a doctorate in any field, to be the leader of communities in a situation as volatile as ours.<sup>46</sup>

At the same time, he praised the qualities of a candidate for Dankowicz's successor—Abraham Danon.<sup>47</sup>

Letters sent to the AIU constitute, therefore, a very important source in the research into the relationships between the Ashkenazi and the Sephardic Jews in Bulgaria. This is one aspect of the history of the Bulgarian Diaspora which, similarly to the work of subsequent Chief Rabbis, still waits to be further explored.

## ABBREVIATIONS

AI = Archives Israélites. Recueil politique et religieux.

AAIU Bulg. = Archives of the Alliance Israélite Universelle in Paris. Collection Bulgarie.

DN = *Die Neuzeit. Wochenschrift für politische, religiöse und Kultur-Interessen.*

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<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> Benbassa Rodrigue 1998: 23.

<sup>46</sup> AAIU Bulg. I C 5; 10.1.1891.

<sup>47</sup> AAIU Bulg. I C 7; 25.1.1892.

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